

East of the Sun and West of the Moon

Norway

Once upon a time there was a poor peasant who had so many children that he did not have enough of either food or clothing to give them. Pretty children they all were, but the prettiest was the youngest daughter, who was so lovely there was no end to her loveliness.

One day -- it was on a Thursday evening late in the fall -- the weather was wild and rough outside, and it was cruelly dark. The rain was falling and the wind blowing, until the walls of the cottage shook. They were all sitting around the fire, busy with this thing and that. Then all at once something gave three taps on the window. The father went out to see what was the matter. Outside, what should he see but a great big white bear.

"Good evening to you," said the white bear.

"The same to you," said the man.

"Will you give me your youngest daughter? If you will, I'll make you as rich as you are now poor," said the bear.

Well, the man would not be at all sorry to be so rich; but still he thought he must have a bit of a talk with his daughter first; so he went in and told them how there was a great white bear waiting outside, who had given his word to make them so rich if he could only have the youngest daughter.

The girl said "No!" outright. Nothing could get her to say anything else; so the man went out and settled it with the white bear, that he should come again the next Thursday evening and get an answer. Meantime he talked to his daughter, and kept on telling her of all the riches they would get, and how well off she herself would be. At last she agreed to it, so she washed and mended her rags, and made herself as smart as she could. Soon she was ready for the trip, for she didn't have much to take along.

The next Thursday evening came the white bear to fetch her. She got on his back with her bundle, and off they went. After they had gone a good way, the white bear said, "Are you afraid?"

No, she wasn't.

"Just hold tight to my shaggy coat, and there's nothing to be afraid of," said the bear.

She rode a long, long way, until they came to a large steep cliff. The white bear knocked on it. A door opened, and they came into a castle, where there were many rooms all lit up; rooms gleaming with silver and gold. Further, there was a table set there, and it was all as grand as grand could be. Then the white bear gave her a silver bell; and when she wanted anything, she only had to ring it, and she would get it at once.

Well, after she had eaten, and it became evening, she felt sleepy from her journey, and thought she would like to go to bed, so she rang the bell. She had barely rung it before she found herself in a room, where there was a bed made as fair and white as anyone would wish to sleep in, with silken pillows and curtains, and gold fringe. All that was in the room was gold or silver. After she had gone to bed, and put out the light, a man came and laid himself alongside her. It was the white bear, who cast off his pelt at night; but she never saw him, for he always came after she had put out the light. Before the day dawned he was up and off again. Things went on happily for a while, but at last she became quiet and sad. She was alone all day long, and she became very homesick to see her father and mother and brothers and sisters. So one day, when the white bear asked what was wrong with her, she said it was so lonely there, and how she longed to go home to see her father and mother and brothers and sisters, and that was why she was so sad, because she couldn't get to them.

"Well," said the bear, "that can happen all right, but you must promise me, not to talk alone with your mother, but only when the others are around to hear. She will want to take you by the hand and lead you into a room to talk alone with her. But you must not do that, or else you'll bring bad luck on both of us."

So one Sunday the white bear came and said they could now set off to see her father and mother. Off they went, she sitting on his back; and they went far and long. At last they came to a grand house. Her bothers and sisters were outside running about and playing. Everything was so pretty, it was a joy to see.

"This is where your father and mother live now," said the white bear. "Now don't forget what I told you, else you'll make us both unhappy."

No, heaven forbid, she'd not forget. When they reached the house, the white bear turned around and left her.

She went in to see her father and mother, and there was such joy, that there was no end to it. None of them could thank her enough for all she had done for them. They now had everything they could wish for, as good as good could be. Then they wanted to know how *she* was.

Well, she said, it was very good to live where she did; she had all she wished. I don't know what else she said, but I don't think she told any of them the whole story. That afternoon, after they had eaten dinner, everything happened as the white bear had said it would. Her mother wanted to talk with her alone in her bedroom; but she remembered what the white bear had said, and wouldn't go with her.

"What we have to talk about we can talk about any time," she said, and put her mother off. But somehow or other, her mother got to her at last, and she had to tell her the whole story. She told her, how every night, after she had gone to bed, a man came and lay down beside her as soon as she had put out the light, and how she never saw him, because he was always up and away before the morning dawned; and how she was terribly sad, for she wanted so much to see him, and how she was by herself all day long, and how dreary, and lonesome it was.

"Oh dear," said her mother; "it may well be a troll you are sleeping with! But now I'll give you some good advice how to see him. I'll give you a candle stub, which you can carry home in your bosom; just light it while he is asleep, but be careful not to drop any tallow on him."

Yes, she took the candle, and hid it in her bosom, and that evening the white bear came and took her away.

But when they had gone a piece, the white bear asked if all hadn't happened as he had said.

She couldn't deny that it had.

"Take care," said he, "if you have listened to your mother's advice, you will bring bad luck on us both, and it will be finished with the two of us."

No, by no means!

So when she reached home, and had gone to bed, it was the same as before. A man came and lay down beside her; but in the middle of the night, when she heard that he was fast asleep, she got up and lit the candle. She let the light shine on him, and saw that he was the most handsome prince one ever set eyes on. She fell so deeply in love with him, that she thought she couldn't live if she didn't give him a kiss at once. And so she did, but as she kissed him she let three drops of hot tallow drip onto his shirt, and he woke up.

"What have you done?" he cried; "now you have made us both unlucky, for had you held out only this one year, I would have been free! I have a stepmother who has bewitched me, so that I am a white bear by day, and a man by night. But now all ties are broken between us. Now I must leave you for her. She lives in a castle east of the sun and west of the moon, and there, too, is a princess, one with a nose three yards long, and now I will have to marry her."

She cried and grieved, but there was no help for it; he had to go.

Then she asked if she could go with him.

No, she could not.

"Tell me the way, then," she said, "so I can look for you; surely I may do that."

Yes, she could do that, but there was no way leading to the place. It lay east of the sun and west of the moon, and she'd never find her way there.

The next morning, when she woke up, both the prince and the castle were gone, and she was lying on a little green patch, in the midst of the thick, dark forest, and by her side lay the same bundle of rags she had brought with her from her old home.

When she had rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, and cried until she was tired, she set out on her way, and walked many, many days, until she came to a high cliff. An old woman sat under it, and played with a golden apple which she tossed about. The girl asked her if she knew the way to the prince, who lived with his stepmother in the castle east of the sun and west of the moon, and who was to marry the princess with a nose three yards long.

"How did you come to know about him?" asked the old woman. "Maybe you are the girl who should have had him?"

Yes, she was.

"So, so; it's you, is it?" said the old woman. "Well, all I know about him is, that he lives in the castle east of the sun and west of the moon, and that you'll get there too late or never; but still you may borrow my horse, and you can ride him to my next neighbor. Maybe she'll be able to tell you; and when you get there just give the horse a switch under the left ear, and beg him to be off home. And you can take this golden apple along with you."

So she got on the horse, and rode a long, long time, until she came to another cliff, under which sat another old woman, with a golden carding comb. The girl asked her if she knew the way to the castle that lay east of the sun and west of the moon, and she answered, like the first old woman, that she knew nothing about it, except that it was east of the sun and west of the moon.

"And you'll get there too late or never; but you can borrow my horse to my next neighbor; maybe she'll tell you all about it; and when you get there, just switch the horse under the left ear, and beg him to be off for home."

This old woman gave her the golden carding comb; she might find some use for it, she said. So the girl got up on the horse, and again rode a long, long way. At last she came to another great cliff, under which sat another old woman, spinning with a golden spinning wheel. She asked her, as well, if she knew the way to the prince, and where the castle was that lay east of the sun and west of the moon. But it was the same thing over again.

"Perhaps you are the one who should have had the prince?" said the old woman.

Yes, that she was.

But she didn't know the way any better than the other two. She knew it was east of the sun and west of the moon, but that was all.

"And you'll get there too late or never; but I'll lend you my horse, and then I think you'd best ride to the east wind and ask him; maybe he knows his way around those parts, and can blow you there. When you get to him, just give the horse a switch under the left ear, and he'll trot home by himself."

She too gave her her golden spinning wheel. "Maybe you'll find a use for it," said the old woman.

She rode many weary days, before she got to the east wind's house, but at last she did reach it, and she asked the east wind if he could tell her the way to the prince who lived east of the sun and west of the moon. Yes, the east wind had often heard tell of it, the prince and the castle, but he didn't know the way there, for he had never blown so far.

"But, if you want, I'll go with you to my brother the west wind. Maybe he knows, for he's much stronger. If you will just get on my back I'll carry you there."

Yes, she got on his back, and off they went in a rush.

When they arrived at the west wind's house, the east wind said the girl he had brought was the one who was supposed to have had the prince who lived in the castle east of the sun and west of the moon. She had set out to find him, and he had brought her here, and would be glad to know if the west wind knew how to get to the castle.

"No," said the west wind, "I've never blown so far; but if you want, I'll go with you to our brother the south wind, for he's much stronger than either of us, and he has flown far and wide. Maybe he'll tell you. Get on my back, and I'll carry you to him."

Yes, she got on his back, and so they traveled to the south wind, and I think it didn't take long at all.

When they got there, the west wind asked him if he could tell her the way to the castle that lay east of the sun and west of the moon, for she was the one who was supposed to have had the prince who lived there.

"Is that so?" said the south wind. "Is she the one? Well, I have visited a lot of places in my time, but I have not yet blown there. If you want, I'll take you to my brother the north wind; he is the oldest and strongest of us all, and if he doesn't know where it is, you'll never find anyone in the world to tell you. Get on my back, and I'll carry you there."

Yes, she got on his back, and away he left his house at a good clip. They were not long underway. When they reached the north wind's house he was so wild and cross, that he blew cold gusts at them from a long way off. "Blast you both, what do you want?" he roared at them from afar, so that it struck them with an icy shiver.

"Well," said the south wind, "you don't need to bluster so, for here I am, your brother, the south wind, and here is the girl who was supposed to have had the prince who lives in the castle that lies east of the sun and west of the moon, and now she wants to ask you if you ever were there, and can show her the way, for she wants so much to find him again."

"Yes, I know where it is," said the north wind; "a single time I blew an aspen leaf there, but afterward I was so tired that I couldn't blow a puff for many days. But if you really wish to go there, and aren't afraid to come along with me, I'll take you on my back and see if I can blow you there."

Yes, with all her heart; she wanted to and had to get there if it were at all possible; and she wouldn't be afraid, however madly he went.

"Very well, then," said the north wind, "but you must sleep here tonight, for we must have the whole day before us, if we're to get there at all."

Early next morning the north wind woke her, and puffed himself up, and blew himself out, and made himself so stout and big, that he was gruesome to look at. Off they went high up through the air, as if they would not stop until they reached the end of the world.

Here on earth there was a terrible storm; acres of forest and many houses were blown down, and when it swept over the sea, ships wrecked by the hundred.

They tore on and on -- no one can believe how far they went -- and all the while they still went over the sea, and the north wind got more and more weary, and so out of breath he could barely bring out a puff, and his wings drooped and drooped, until at last he sunk so low that the tops of the waves splashed over his heels.

"Are you afraid?" said the north wind.

No, she wasn't.

They weren't very far from land by now, and the north wind had enough strength left that he managed to throw her up on the shore under the windows of the castle which lay east of the sun and west of the moon. But then he was so weak and worn out, that he had to stay there and rest many days before he could go home again.

The next morning the girl sat down under the castle window, and began to play with the golden apple. The first person she saw was the long-nosed princess who was to have the prince.

"What do you want for your golden apple, you girl?" said the long-nosed one, as she opened the window.

"It's not for sale, for gold or money," said the girl.

"If it's not for sale for gold or money, what is it that you will sell it for? You may name your own price," said the princess.

"Well, you can have it, if I may get to the prince, who lives here, and be with him tonight," said the girl whom the north wind had brought.

Yes, that could be done. So the princess took the golden apple; but when the girl came up to the prince's bedroom that night, he was fast asleep. She called him and shook him, and cried and grieved, but she could not wake him up. The next morning, as soon as day broke, the princess with the long nose came and drove her out.

That day she sat down under the castle windows and began to card with her golden carding comb, and the same thing happened. The princess asked what she wanted for it. She said it wasn't for sale for gold or money, but if she could have permission to go to the prince and be with him that night, the princess could have it. But when she went to his room she found him fast asleep again, and however much she called, and shook, and cried, and prayed, she couldn't get life into him. As soon as the first gray peep of day came, the princess with the long nose came, and chased her out again.

That day the girl sat down outside under the castle window and began to spin with her golden spinning wheel, and the princess with the long nose wanted to have it as well. She opened the window and asked what she wanted for it. The girl said, as she had said twice before, that it wasn't for sale for gold or money, but if she could go to the prince who was there, and be alone with him that night she could have it.

Yes, she would be welcome to do that. But now you must know that there were some Christians who had been taken there, and while they were sitting in their room, which was next to the prince's, they had heard how a woman had been in there, crying, praying, and calling to him for two nights in a row, and they told this to the prince.

That evening, when the princess came with a sleeping potion, the prince pretended to drink it, but threw it over his shoulder, for he could guess it was a sleeping potion. So, when the girl came in, she found the prince wide awake, and then she told him the whole story of how she had come there.

"Ah," said the prince, "you've come in the very nick of time, for tomorrow is to be our wedding day. But now I won't have the long-nose, and you are the only woman in the world who can set me free. I'll say that I want to see what my wife is fit for, and beg her to wash the shirt which has the three spots of tallow on it. She'll agree, for she doesn't know that you are the one who put them there. Only Christians, and not such a pack of trolls, can wash them out again. I'll say that I will marry only the woman who can wash them out, and ask you to try it."

So there was great joy and love between them all the night. But next day, when the wedding was planned, the prince said, "First of all, I'd like to see what my bride is fit for."

"Yes!" said the stepmother, with all her heart.

"Well," said the prince, "I've got a fine shirt which I'd like for my wedding shirt, but somehow or other it got three spots of tallow on it, which I must have washed out. I have sworn to marry only the woman who is able to do that. If she can't, then she's not worth having."

Well, that was no big thing they said, so they agreed, and the one with the long nose began to wash away as hard as she could, but the more she rubbed and scrubbed, the bigger the spots grew.

"Ah!" said the old troll woman, her mother, "you can't wash. Let me try."

But she had hardly touched the shirt, before it got far worse than before, and with all her rubbing, and wringing, and scrubbing, the spots grew bigger and blacker, and the shirt got ever darker and uglier.

Then all the other trolls began to wash, but the longer it lasted, the blacker and uglier the shirt grew, until at last it was as black all over as if it been up the chimney.

"Ah!" said the old troll woman, "none of you is worth a straw; you can't wash. Why there, outside, sits a beggar girl, I'll bet she knows how to wash better than the whole lot of you. Come in, girl!" he shouted.

She came in.

"Can you wash this shirt clean, girl, you?" he said.

"I don't know," she said, "but I think I can."

And almost before she had taken it and dipped it into the water, it was as white as driven snow, and whiter still.

"Yes, you are the girl for me," said the prince.

At that the old troll woman flew into such a rage, she exploded on the spot, and the princess with the long nose after her, and the whole pack of trolls after her -- at least I've never heard a word about them since.

As for the prince and princess, they set free all the poor Christians who had been captured and shut up there; and they took with them all the silver and gold, and flew away as far as they could from the castle that lay east of the sun and west of the moon.

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- Source: Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, *Popular Tales from the Norse*, translated by George Webbe Dasent (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1859), [no. 36, pp. 266-80](#).
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